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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 001523

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SUBJECT: FM ZARIFI ON OPENING THE BRIDGE AND DUSHANBE SUMMITS

REF: A) DUSHANBE 1481 B) DUSHANBE 1467 C) CEN-DUSHANBE OCTOBER 19, 2007 EMAIL  
REGARDING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

CLASSIFIED BY: Tracey A. Jacobson, Ambassador, US Embassy  
Dushanbe, State.  
REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. At an hour-long meeting October 22 requested  
by Ambassador, Foreign Minister Zarifi:

--admitted that the government had not decided which agency  
would be in charge of the facilities including the U.S.-funded  
bridge at the Nizhniy Pyanzh border, but said they were working  
toward a decision;

--agreed that the government would allow trucks from Pakistan  
carrying cement for the Japanese road project at Nizhniy Pyanzh  
to cross the bridge starting October 27;

--promised joint meetings with all relevant agencies for the  
upcoming Customs and Border assessment, including meetings with  
Afghan border authorities at Nizhniy Pyanzh;

--asked for (another) formal demarche regarding recent problems  
faced by the National Democratic Institute, and claimed no  
knowledge of any decision on Jehovah's Witnesses;

--gave a half-hour readout of the recent CIS, Collective  
Security Treaty Organization, and Eurosec summits in Dushanbe.  
End Summary.

BABY STEPS FORWARD AT THE BRIDGE

¶2. (SBU) Zarifi confirmed information DCM had received last  
week (ref A) regarding the GOTI decision to allow Pakistani  
cement trucks to cross the Nizhniy Pyanzh bridge for the  
Japanese road construction project. He said the MFA had to  
apply "extreme pressure" to the State Committee for National  
Security to get agreement on use of the bridge. Zarifi said  
most in the government understand that the bridge is essential  
to the development of regional economic integration, and that  
the ferry at Nizhniy Pyanzh is not a reliable alternative -  
further, there are already 270 vehicles waiting to cross the  
bridge from the Afghan side. Zarifi attributed the rash of  
negative press about the bridge from Uzbek sources to  
"jealousy."

¶3. (SBU) Zarifi admitted bridge management is still an open  
question. The MFA is currently collecting input from all  
concerned agencies and ministries to prepare a decision memo for  
the president on which organization will be in charge and how  
agencies will cooperate at the bridge. Ambassador urged the  
earliest possible decision in order to ensure that the upcoming  
Customs and Border assessment/training visit will be as useful  
as possible, and to allow us to order appropriate furniture and  
equipment for the ancillary border facilities in time for their  
completion in December. Zarifi demurred on a timeline for a  
decision, but assured the Ambassador that the visiting

assessment would get joint meetings in Dushanbe, and meetings with relevant Tajik and Afghan authorities at the border.

#### BUT BACKWARDS ON DEMOCRATIC REFORM

¶4. (SBU) Ambassador raised increased harassment of NDI Amcit Director (ref B) and reports of a Ministry of Culture decision to ban the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses as disappointing examples of steps backwards in the areas of democratic reform and human rights. Zarifi feigned ignorance of the decision to issue only a one-month visa to Bader, and appeared genuinely surprised by the Jehovah's Witness decision. On NDI, Zarifi agreed that the harassment sounded out of line but asked for an official communication on the subject. Ambassador said she was expecting to receive demarches from Washington on both topics in the nearest future (Note: We have sent SCA/CEN proposed language for these demarches separately). When, later in the meeting, Zarifi insisted the time had come to look ahead to an official visit for Rahmon to Washington (his last was five years ago), Ambassador said positive steps forward in the area of democratization were essential before we could consider a visit.

Especially given the Administration's focus on human rights, an invitation would be impossible absent registration and support for U.S. NGOs working in the area of democratic reform and human rights.

#### SUMMIT READOUT

¶5. (SBU) Zarifi said he was pleased by the three Dushanbe summits, as there was "real dialogue" and the organizations have evolved from Russia-led clubs to organizations where the smaller states can have an impact and are "not dominated by larger states." He has promised a more detailed readout on migration, WTO accession, and other issues at a briefing for European Ambassadors (plus the U.S. Ambassador later this week). He lamented that as usual, Uzbekistan was the main barrier to progress. On cooperation with Afghanistan, all the other member-countries were in favor, but Uzbekistan was adamantly opposed. Only after "pressure" from the other heads of state did Karimov agree to include a desire to work more closely with

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Afghanistan in the communiquis. The participation of the OSCE Secretary General and UNODC Chief was very helpful in this

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regard.

¶6. (SBU) Ambassador asked specifically about media reports that Uzbekistan had agreed to permit the transit of electricity from Turkmenistan across its territory to Tajikistan. Zarifi replies that getting this far had required "extensive diplomatic maneuvering" and in the end, since the Turkmen had refused to go to Tashkent, and the Uzbeks had refused to go to either Ashgabat or Dushanbe to sign a document, the three sides each signed their version of the agreement in their own capitals. The Uzbeks had demanded that Tajikistan pay USD 5 million for renovation of the transmission lines; the Tajik side agreed to pay this cost by eliminating 5 million dollars of the debt Uzbekistan has with Barqi Tojik, the Tajik energy authority. The Uzbeks then demanded cash up front, saying they'd pay the debt later. The Uzbeks have also insisted on payment of transit fees in advance. Zarifi said the Uzbeks keep throwing up new obstacles, but he's optimistic there will be some gas deliveries as early as November. "We don't want a repeat of the desperate energy situation we had last winter, but the Uzbek authorities want the Tajik people to be dissatisfied." Zarifi says he sat in on the closed Heads of State sessions, and had an opportunity to observe Karimov closely. "I learned a lot about the illness of depression when I was living in the United States. This man exhibits all the symptoms of someone suffering deep depression. There's nothing wrong with all of his other organs, but there's definitely a problem with his brain," insisted Zarifi.

¶7. (C) COMMENT. While we are heartened to see that MFA, at least, is taking steps towards coordination and progress in

managing the Nizhniy Pyanzh border crossing, we remain disappointed that the government in general, and Zarifi in particular, appear less and less willing to engage seriously on issues of democratic reform and human rights. We must ensure that every interaction with Tajik officials, at every level, includes the message that our relationship can only grow in a balanced way, and continued security and economic cooperation require progress on human rights as well. End Comment.  
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